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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000194

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SUBJECT: ALLOCATION OF PARLIAMENTARY SEATS CONTINUES TO DOMINATE LOCAL POLITICS

REF: A) MASERU 116; B) MASERU 113; C) MASERU 136

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Summary

¶1. In the aftermath of the April 22 attacks in Maseru (ref A), GOL authorities and members of the security establishment have asserted that the situation is back to normal. However, in recent days the issue of allocation of proportional seats in the National Assembly has resurfaced. This thorny issue has been a source of discontent among opposition parties since the 2007 general elections (ref B). Members of the general public have brought this issue up on local radio call-in programs, urging politicians to address this issue before the situation deteriorates. Other local activists have called on the Prime Minister (PM) to reshuffle some Ministers and Ministries and include opposition members in the newly reformed Cabinet in order for political stability to prevail (ref C).

History of the failed SADC mediation

¶2. In October 2008, the political dialogue collapsed between the GOL and opposition parties regarding the disputed allocation of seats in the National Assembly. According to local media and analysts, this was caused by "arrogant and intransigent" politicians who have failed to embrace dialogue as a way of advancing peaceful and lasting solutions (ref C). Opposition parties wanted to invite international electoral experts to help determine if the "Mixed Member Proportional" (MMP) electoral model mandated by Lesotho law was correctly implemented during the 2007 elections. The GOL was opposed to bringing in experts. Opposition parties wanted the recommendations of the international experts to be binding. Neither side could agree to terms for the proposed memorandum of understanding, and the intransigent stance of both parties lead to a standstill in the negotiation. SADC negotiator Sir Ketumile Masire expressed his frustration with both sides before leaving Lesotho in October 2008 without any resolution to the process. Currently there are no formal plans to restart the talks.

The public wants to see change in the Cabinet

¶3. Disgruntled ordinary citizens vented their frustration over the radio waves during the past week. On Friday, June 6, on Harvest FM's current affairs call-in program "Rise and Shine", members of the general public urged Prime Minister Mosisili to reshuffle his Cabinet. (Note: Radio call-in programs on current affairs issues are a common barometer for measuring public opinion. End note.) They cited poor service delivery as a

primary reason for their request. They called on the PM to include experienced opposition members in his future cabinet. Meanwhile, a well placed source in the governing party indicated that members of the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) youth league have advised the PM to fire some ministers and replace them with loyal competent party members. The same sources also point out that Prime Minister Mosisili is now reluctant to proceed with a cabinet reshuffle because there is a rumor that some ministers - suspecting they would lose their portfolios - have stated at the governing party caucus that they will defy the PM's decision to fire them unless he also resigns.

¶4. According to the June 11 issue of the Lesotho Times newspaper, the governing LCD party's Youth League wrote a petition urging Mosisili to restructure his cabinet, and to dismiss some ministers for alleged corruption. The petition is reported to have been given to the Minister of Communications and Secretary General of the LCD, Mothejoa Metsing, to submit to the Prime Minister. One youth league member was quoted as saying, "The youth are focusing on ministers and their principal secretaries because their offices are actually a breeding ground for corruption." Another stated: "The abuse of state funds and property is rife within government ministries and the youth have called for the termination of the constitutional practice whereby the Prime Minister selects members of the Cabinet at his own discretion." The Lesotho Times indicated that Metsing confirmed the existence of the petition but refused to discuss its contents.

Public calls for "revolution" in the ways of government

¶5. On Monday June 9, during the PC FM morning show "Thaha-Meso," callers accused the governing LCD of manipulating the MMP electoral model. They also urged the PM to allow experts to come to Lesotho to assist in rectifying the incorrect allocation

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of proportional seats in the National Assembly. During another "Rise and Shine" call-in program on the morning of June 10, the allocation of seats once again became the subject of a heated debate. One caller warned that if "the owner of a dog has a tendency to step on the dog's tail, and this continues over a long period, one day, the dog will bite the owner." Others pointed out that a revolution was necessary to correct the situation in the country. (Comment: We analyze the use of the word "revolution" in this context to simply indicate the need for a change in the ruling party, with increased pressure on the PM to consider a Cabinet reshuffle. Post does not interpret this to be an actual call to arms. End Comment.)

Is there a way forward?

¶6. Failure to continue the dialogue has made the possibility of a resolution to this conflict very unlikely. The LCD does not believe that it has anything to gain by compromise, since neither SADC nor the local courts will force the issue. Some local analysts suggest that a government of national unity is the only answer to the current political stalemate. It is unclear at this point what the next course of action will be regarding the stalled talks on allocation of seats. According to some academics, the lack of tolerance by the governing party has exacerbated the situation in the country, with each side suspicious of, and unwilling to deal with, the other.

Comment: Ruling party holds all the cards

¶7. The issue of the allocation of proportional seats keeps coming up in various forums, demonstrating the importance of the matter for opposition parties and its increasing gravity for the everyday citizens of the country. It is also clear that

internal divisions are slowly brewing within the LCD party. Some local observers fear that the parties' unwillingness to compromise and find a solution could lead to political instability. Others have accused the LCD of arrogance and lack of commitment to a resolution. In order to reach a lasting solution, difficult concessions would have to be made which would satisfy the desires on both sides. However, with the LCD party still currently holding all the trump cards, post does not expect to see this kind of compromise occur.

NOLAN